

To Members of the Children's Committee, this is written testimony in support of H.B. No. 6725

(RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES.

My name is Cygler, LCSW and I have been a clinical social worker in the state of Connecticut for over eight years. After graduating from Southern Connecticut State University with my Master's Degree in 2006, I accepted a job at a children's residential treatment center. I worked with an eclectic group of adolescent girls, who despite immense resilience, presented with a complicated array of emotional and behavioral problems. For many of the girls, their experiences with the mental health and child welfare systems were profoundly disappointing and some had developed significant barriers limiting their ability to establish trusting relationships with caregivers. Finding limited success with standard interventions, I referred some of these children to Soul Friends, a local agency offering a dynamic blend of animal-assisted interventions. I had the pleasure of witnessing the tremendous potential for therapeutic growth which can be catalyzed initially by the power of the human-animal bond. I was so impressed by this intervention that I ultimately elected to train my own companion animal and become a registered Pet Partner and provider of animal-assisted therapy services. For the past five and half years, I have had the privilege of working at Soul Friends and offering animal-assisted therapy services to children and families throughout the state.

Trained therapy animals, working collaboratively with competent and compassionate mental health clinicians can lend a critical and unique therapeutic support to individuals impacted by trauma. Establishing a framework for the delivery of these services during unfortunate moments of crisis is an essential component to promoting healing and resilience. I would lend my enthusiastic support to H.B.No 6725 (Raised) An act concerning animal-assisted therapy services. The bill addresses the following: 1) training for Department of Children and Families workers on the healing benefits of the human-animal bond; 2) establishment of a critical incident therapy animal response teams in the state; and 3) ongoing animal assisted therapy services under the supervision of a mental health provider. I would strongly urge you to support this legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

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Outpatient Clinical Social Worker

Soul Friends, Inc: Animal Assisted Therapy Programs of CT